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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

THURSDAY, May 4, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

SUBJECT: "NATIVE MATERIALS AND RURAL HANDICRAFTS." Information from Dr. Edith Allen, Extension Service, United States Department of Agriculture.

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The recent troubles in Europe have put an end to the importation of many small inexpensive articles we used to get from Czechoslovakia for dress and table accessories. Buttons, dress findings, feather novelties, costume jewelry, wooden-bead hand-bags artificial flowers, and small leather articles are some of the former importations that have been cut off. The supply of table accessories and favors, and many ornamental trifles that used to freshen our homes or make our parties festive from European sources is greatly reduced.

But it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. In this case there is a very definite opportunity for the rural American woman who has a handicraft hobby to expand it into a source of extra cash. She can offer some very effective substitutes for the oddities and ornaments that used to cross the seas. In many parts of the United States there are materials growing wild, in the woods and the hedge-rows, to be had for the taking; and the home garden can be made to yield other materials for ingenious handicrafters.

When materials cost little or nothing and spare time is chiefly used for assembling them, the resulting products can be sold at attractive prices and yet bring the maker a fair return for her labor. The thing for those who venture into this field to bear in mind is to design articles that can be quickly and easily made and that will attract sales because of their charm, their utility, or their oddity. Most accessories for dress or table have a short life and do not merit tedious work or elaborate equipment for making.

Let's have a look at some of the possibilities, from the standpoint of what women already have done in various states. I'm sure these examples will inspire others to create ingenious, useful, salable articles.

Take dress accessories: Farm women have made and sold buttons and buckles of wood, nuts, leather, and coconut. Pottery clay is giving good results in Georgia for beads as well as buttons, pins, and other costume jewelry. Wooden and other beads are also used to make handbags, knitting bags, and purses. Fermented flower petals are fashioned into colorful, fragrant beads by Florida farm women, and strung into necklaces and bracelets; so are shells and hard seeds like Job's tears and rose seeds.

Acorns, feathers, peanuts, and different kinds of straw have been converted into fetching hat trimmings and dress accessories in several states. So have many kinds of small burrs and balls, - particularly pine and beechnut burrs, magnolia burrs, sycamore and sweet-gum balls. Burrs wired on stems, and delicately colored, made fascinating winter coat bouquets from Tennessee. Dainty little feathers lose their identity in charming artificial flower ornaments.

Hats have been designed and made by braiding corn husks, or by using local straw, or home-grown leather. Cowhide bolts, buckles, buttons and bags, have been made from the smaller parts of home-tanned hides, when the larger portions were used for chair seats or harness-making. Gloves are made from softer types of leather. Even bed-room slippers have been made from corn husks.

Then, there are table accessories. They command a market as well as dress accessories. The things that grow wild lend themselves well to permanent dried bouquets and centerpieces. Evergreens, grasses, bright berries, burrs, small pine cones, and colorful dried pods and dried flowers are all used in this way. Christmas table decorations and door wreaths attract many customers for a short season in some of the northern states. In New York and New England states

evergreens and tree ornaments as well as favors for the Christmas table are in demand.

At the Rural Arts Exhibit last winter in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there was a booth filled with articles made by Tennessee women from corn husks. Among these products there were many quaint and amusing corn husk dolls, and other novel table favors. And a very recent type of favor I saw at a luncheon was a tiny frog, made of rose and white sea shells, put together with pipe cleaners!

However, rural handicraft workers can think of many salable items in addition to the sort of articles we formerly imported from Czechoslovakia. Perhaps the public has bought more baskets than anything else rural people make. Baskets of long leaf pine needles; of honeysuckle; of willow, sweetgrass, rattan, Virginia creeper, wisteria vine, bamboo, Johnson grass, bear grass, and splints from native hickory or oak- whichever is plentiful in one's locality. Big and little ornamental baskets are made for such varied uses as mending and sewing, waste-paper, flower-vase holders, wood baskets, market baskets, gardening baskets, sandwich carriers, baskets for gift packages of jellies and jams, for shopping or knitting, - and basketry trays of many shapes and sizes. Most of the shapes and styles we see in baskets offered for sale along country roads are those customary in that particular part of the country, or they have been originated by the clever patient fingers of rural folk.

Brushes and brooms are needed by everybody. Scrub palmetto, pine needles, and wiregrass are materials used for utility brushes of many kinds, hearth brooms, and whisks. Turkey feathers are still made into dusters.

Balsam fir and pine needles make fragrant fillings for cushions and pillows in Maine and other New England states, while dried Spanish moss in the south serves for such filling.

Time does not permit describing more of these handicraft uses for simple wild-growing materials, but I should like to add that there are rural women who collect natural dye materials for sale- walnut, hickory, peach leaves, sweet gum, sumac berries, and cedar tops, among others. In areas where hooked rugs and other home-dyed fabric articles are made these dyes have a market.

Yes, there is an opportunity for the rural American woman in the field of handicraft. The chief thing for anyone to do who is interested is, first to take stock of the native materials she knows about; then, make a few sample articles and see if she can find customers. She may be able to interest hotels, tourist places, or stores, in displaying and handling her wares for her. Unless, of course, she has access to some large buyer of such articles who will take enough to keep her profitably busy.

